

CHAPTER 5

PLAY AREA RELATIONSHIPS

5-1. Introduction.

This chapter describes how to create a diverse play area while meeting child safety and functional requirements. This is accomplished by maintaining the appropriate functional relationships between play area components. Adjacency diagrams illustrating appropriate relationships for play lots, neighborhood parks, and community parks are included. These diagrams should be used as the basis for creating conceptual designs for the three age groups addressed in this manual.

5-2. Play Area Component Relationships.

The following guidelines for play area component relationships apply to all age groups and were used to develop the adjacency diagrams provided in this chapter.

a. Entry Area. Clearly defined entrances should be provided to orient, inform, and introduce users to the site. Entries should be connected to pedestrian and bike circulation paths, linking the play area to housing, picnic facilities, and community facilities. The entry should relate to parking areas when parking is provided. Parking must be separated from other areas with a barrier. Bike parking should be provided at all entries.

b. Sports and Games. Play areas may include small-scale sports and games, such as small turf areas and multi-use hard surface courts for ball play, running, and group games. Sports and games should be sited in relatively flat locations. These areas should be located to prevent out-of-bounds balls from interfering with traffic and other play activities. Ball walls can provide a vertical surface to focus ball play in a desired direction and can act as barriers to contain ball play activities. Gathering areas should be provided adjacent to sports and games components to provide seating for resting and for watching other children.

c. Dramatic Play. Although dramatic play occurs throughout the play area, designers can deliberately create play area components that support role play, such as a play village or performance area.

(1) *Play Village.* For children ages 18 months through 8 years, design elements, such as play houses and a water source, maybe grouped together to create a play village. Sand play should be located adjacent to the village to provide manipulative material to enhance dramatic play. Pathways should

intersect the play village to provide access to the design elements and to reinforce the village character.

(2) *Performance Area.* For school-age and older children, dramatic play may include small performance areas with ground-level platforms and seating for viewers. The performance area should be positioned away from high activity areas.

d. Sand Play. Sand play should be located away from high activity areas, such as ball play areas. If a play village is provided, sand play should be located near the village. If sand is used as a safety surface in manufactured play equipment areas, separate areas for sand play should be provided away from play equipment.

e. Gardens. Community gardens are small plots of land used by children, families, or community groups for growing ornamental or edible plants. If a play village is provided, the garden should be adjacent to the play village to allow children to harvest plants for village use. Gardens should be separated from circulation pathways and should be surrounded by fencing for plant protection.

f. Gathering Places. Gathering places are comfortable areas where children, youth, and adults can sit and meet, or where infants may safely explore. Gathering places should be located to protect users from the sun and wind. In gathering places, seating should be located to provide sight lines for play area supervision. If views throughout the play area are not possible, seating should be provided in more than one location. Gathering places should be provided adjacent to sports and games to support resting and viewing.

g. Manufactured Play Equipment. Manufactured play equipment should be located to ensure sight lines needed for supervision are not blocked by the equipment. Equipment should also be located to discourage circulation through the play equipment area when children move between play area components. Swings should be located on the edge of the play area to prevent injuries that may occur when children cross the swing area to get to other play activities.

h. Plant Materials. Plant materials should be located to provide climate modification, define boundaries, serve as a visual screen, and support play activity. Shade should be provided in all play areas. Particular attention should be given to providing shade over seating areas in gathering places, over metal play equipment in manufactured play equip-

ment components, and over play areas for young children. Plant material should not be located within play equipment use zones.

i. Landforms. Landforms include natural or manmade variations in topography, and earth sculpture. If appropriate for the primary age group who will be using the play area, play area designs should be adapted to incorporate existing land forms. Manufactured play equipment may be incorporated into landforms to create access onto elevated play equipment.

j. Pathways. Pathways should be provided to allow access up to, into, and around the play area for pedestrians, strollers, bicycles, children and adults with disabilities, and maintenance vehicles. Pathways should be used to separate and define space that serves different functions. Where bicycle use is great enough to cause safety concerns for pedestrians, separate bike paths should be considered.

(1) *Pathways As Play Events.* Pathways may serve as a play event, supporting games, site exploration, and use of wheeled toys, skates, strollers, and bikes. Primary pathways are hard-surfaced and should be located to connect all play area components. Auxiliary or secondary pathways may be provided away from main activity and circulation paths for exploration. Secondary pathways may be composed of more challenging materials, such as packed earth or wood products.

(2) *Service Vehicle Access.* Maintenance access allows maintenance, police, service, and emergency vehicles to travel through the play area to provide emergency assistance and perform service tasks, such as garbage removal, mowing, and replenishing of materials. A service vehicle access route should be provided through the play area along the main pathway. The route should provide a direct connection to all areas covered with loose-fill safety surfacing, such as wood products, sand, gravel, or chopped tire.

k. Signage. Signs should be located to ensure good orientation, direct traffic flow, and provide information about the site and programs. The need for signs depends on the type and complexity of the play area.

l. Parking. Offstreet parking areas may be provided for community parks. Parking should be located near the park entrance at a distance from active areas or picnic areas. Parking must be separated from other areas with a barrier.

5-3. Identify Needed Separation and Barriers.

When developing appropriate play area relationships, some consideration must be given to providing physical separation and barriers between play area components. Barriers, such as shrubs, path-

ways, and low walls, should be used to define activity areas and direct movement through the play area. When needed because of differing safety requirements, barriers should be used to separate age groups. These barriers should allow children to observe activities in other parts of the play area. Fences are only required to protect children from large bodies of water, heavily traveled streets, traffic that is hazardous to the age group using the play area, or other hazards.

a. Serving More Than One Age Group. Play area components serving different age groups should be separated with barriers, such as low walls, pathways, turf areas, or vegetation.

b. Manufactured Play Equipment. Because of differing safety needs, manufactured play equipment designed for children under 5 years old and play equipment designed for children over 5 years old should be separated with barriers, such as low walls or vegetation.

c. Type of Play. Active and passive play activities should be separated by location, pathways, or barriers, such as low walls or vegetation.

5-4. Play Lot (6 Weeks to 9 Years).

Four adjacency diagrams are provided to illustrate how the play area relationships described above should be implemented in the design of play lots. One option is provided for children 6 weeks to 5 years and two options are provided for children 5 years to 9 years. One option is provided for a single play area that serves children 6 weeks to 9 years. This option includes separation between play area components to maintain child safety.

a. Play Lot (6 Weeks to 5 Years). One option is provided for play lots that serve only children under 5 years old. The play area contains an entry area, dramatic play, sand play, a gathering place, and a pathway (fig 5-1).

(1) *Dramatic Play.* The dramatic play component for this age group is designed as a play village. It serves as the play area focal point and center of activity.

(2) *Sand Play.* Sand play is located next to dramatic play to extend play opportunities.

(3) *Gathering Place.* A gathering place for infants and parents is located to allow views throughout the play area. An infant crawl area for children under 12 months is provided adjacent to the seating and on the edge of the play area away from more active play. Shade is provided for the seating area and for the infant crawl area.

(4) *Pathway.* A pathway encircles and intersects the play village. This allows dramatic play that incorporates wheeled toys as imaginary vehicles.

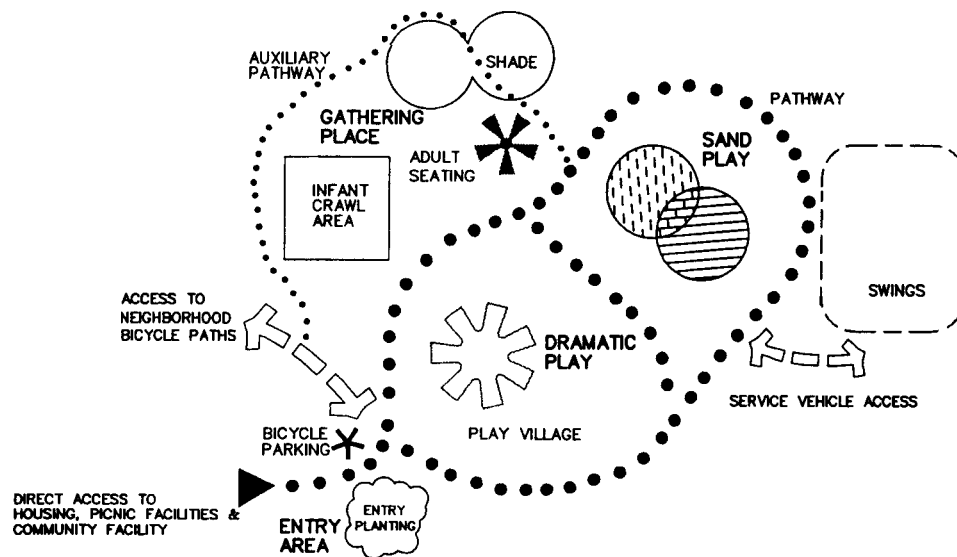


Figure 5-1. Play Lot (6 Weeks to 5 Years).

(5) *Service Vehicle Access.* A maintenance access route to the sand area is provided for ease of maintenance and replenishment of material.

b. Play Lot (5 to 9 Years). Two options for play lots are provided for children ages 5 to 9 years. Option 1 emphasizes manufactured play equipment and dramatic play. Option 2 emphasizes sports and games. The designer should select the diagram which most closely meets the needs of the site analysis and the findings of the design criteria report. A defined entry area that connects pedestrian and bike circulation pathways to the neighborhood and to nearby community facilities is provided in both options. Pathways are also provided in both options to link all play area components.

(1) *Option 1.* Option 1 provides dramatic play and manufactured play equipment for children ages 5 to 9 years (fig 5-2).

(a) *Dramatic Play.* A ground-level platform and seating create an area for impromptu performances. Dramatic play is located away from active play on the edge of the play area. Since the area is shaded and located to provide views throughout the play area, it also serves as a gathering place.

(b) *Manufactured Play Equipment.* The manufactured play equipment component includes a composite play structure and swings. The swings are located on the edge of the play area. Manufactured play equipment is the focal point of the play area.

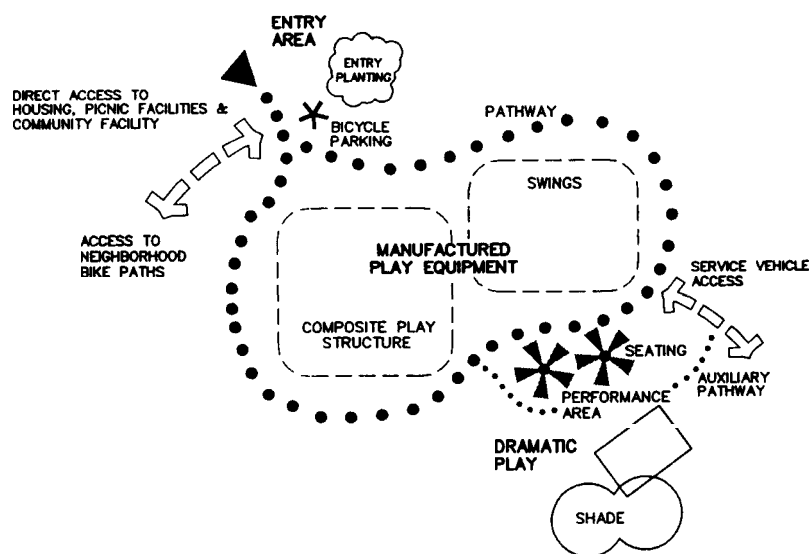


Figure 5-2. Play Lot Option 1 (5 to 9 Years).

(c) *Pathways.* The pathway connects all play area components and encircles the manufactured play equipment. It can accommodate bicycles.

(d) *Service Vehicle Access.* A service vehicle access route increases ease of maintenance.

(2) *Option 2.* Option 2 includes sports and games and a gathering place for children ages 5 to 9 years (fig 5-3).

(a) *Sports and Games.* The central focus of the play area is a multi-use hard surface area. A ball wall focuses ball play in the desired direction of play and helps contain the balls.

(b) *Gathering Place.* Shaded seating for viewing is provided adjacent to the ball play area.

(c) *Pathway.* The pathway is designed as access to the play area and is not intended as a bike path.

(d) *Service Vehicle Access.* A service vehicle access route increases ease of maintenance.

c. *Play Lot (6 Weeks to 9 Years).* One option is provided to accommodate children from 6 weeks to 9 years when it is necessary to combine age groups in one play lot. The play area contains an entry area, a gathering place, and a pathway (fig 5-4). Two manufactured play equipment components are designed to serve different age groups and are separated by barriers.

(1) *Manufactured Play Equipment.* One manufactured play equipment component features a composite play structure designed for children ages 5 to 9 years. A separate manufactured play equipment component designed for children under age five includes swings. Swings are located at the edge of the play area. These two components will be separated by barriers, such as low walls, turf areas, or vegetation.

(2) *Gathering Place.* Seating for adults and children is provided in a location that allows views to all parts of the play area. Shade is included.

(3) *Pathway.* A pathway encircles the play area to link all play area components and to accommodate wheeled toy play.

(4) *Service Vehicle Access.* A service vehicle access route is provided through the play area to increase ease of maintenance.

5-5. Neighborhood Park (9 to 15 Years).

Two adjacency diagrams for neighborhood parks are provided for 9- to 15-year-olds. Option 1 includes a wider variety of play area components. Option 2 emphasizes sports and games. The designer should select the diagram which most closely meets the needs of the site analysis and the findings of the design criteria report. Both options include: entry areas, sports and games, gathering places, and pathways. Pathways in both play areas are connected to neighborhood bike paths and all components within the play area.

a. *Option 1.* The first option for 9- to 15-year-olds includes manufactured play equipment, sports and games, and a garden (fig 5-5).

(1) *Sports and Games.* A large turf area that accommodates various sports and neighborhood activities is the focal point of the play area. In addition, a multi-use hard surface area with a ball wall is located on the edge of the play area. The ball wall directs ball play away from the pathway and entry area.

(2) *Garden.* The garden is located on the edge of the play area and is separated from active play.

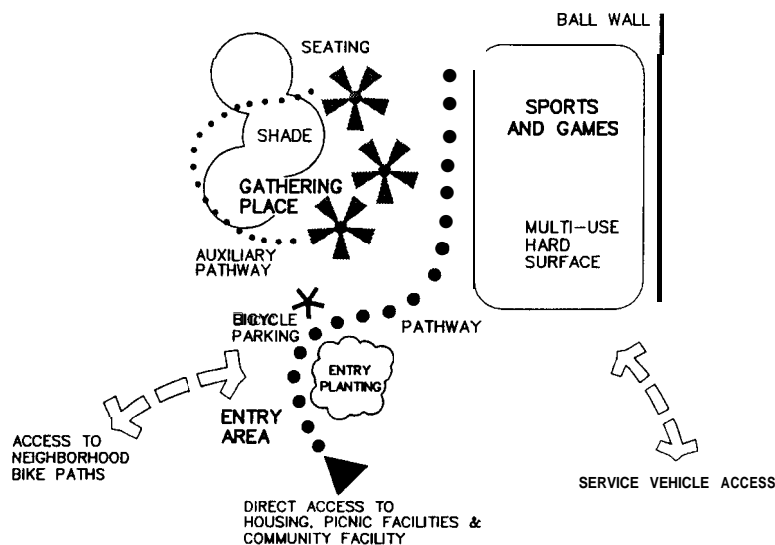


Figure 5-3. Play Lot - Option 2 (5 to 9 Years).

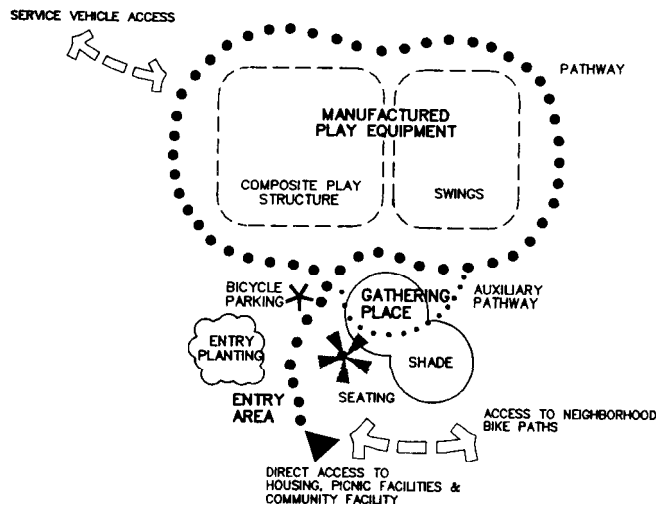


Figure 5-4. Play Lot (6 Weeks to 9 Years)

(3) *Gathering place.* A gathering place is provided near the entry area with views of the turf area.

(4) *Manufactured Play Equipment.* A composite structure and swings are located on the edge of the play area.

(5) *Pathways.* In addition to the primary pathway, an adventure bike path is provided around the perimeter of the play area to separate bike and pedestrian use.

(6) *Service Vehicle Access.* A service vehicle access route is provided through the play area for ease of maintenance.

b. Option 2. Option 2 emphasizes sports and games and includes two gathering places (fig 5-6).

(1) *Sports and Games.* The turf area is the central element of the park. The multi-use hard surface area is located at the edge of the park. A ball wall is provided at the edge to increase ball play opportunities and focus the ball play away from adjacent activities.

(2) *Gathering Place.* A seating area for children and adults is centrally located near the entry area to provide views of all the play components. In addition, a larger gathering area that includes picnic tables is located at the edge of the park. It is located near the ball play area to allow spectators to watch the action on the courts.

(3) *Service Vehicle Access.* A service vehicle access route is provided through the play area for ease of maintenance.

5-6. Community Park (0 to 15 Years).

Two or more adjacency diagrams may be combined to create conceptual play area designs serving more than one age group at a community park (fig 5-7). Figure 5-7 also includes a prioritized list of play area components. These priorities are based on the developmental importance of components to that age group. The order of the list may be used to determine which components should be retained in a design when there are site or budget limitations. Although play area components may have similar labels for all age groups, the site design and design details vary according to the user's age group.

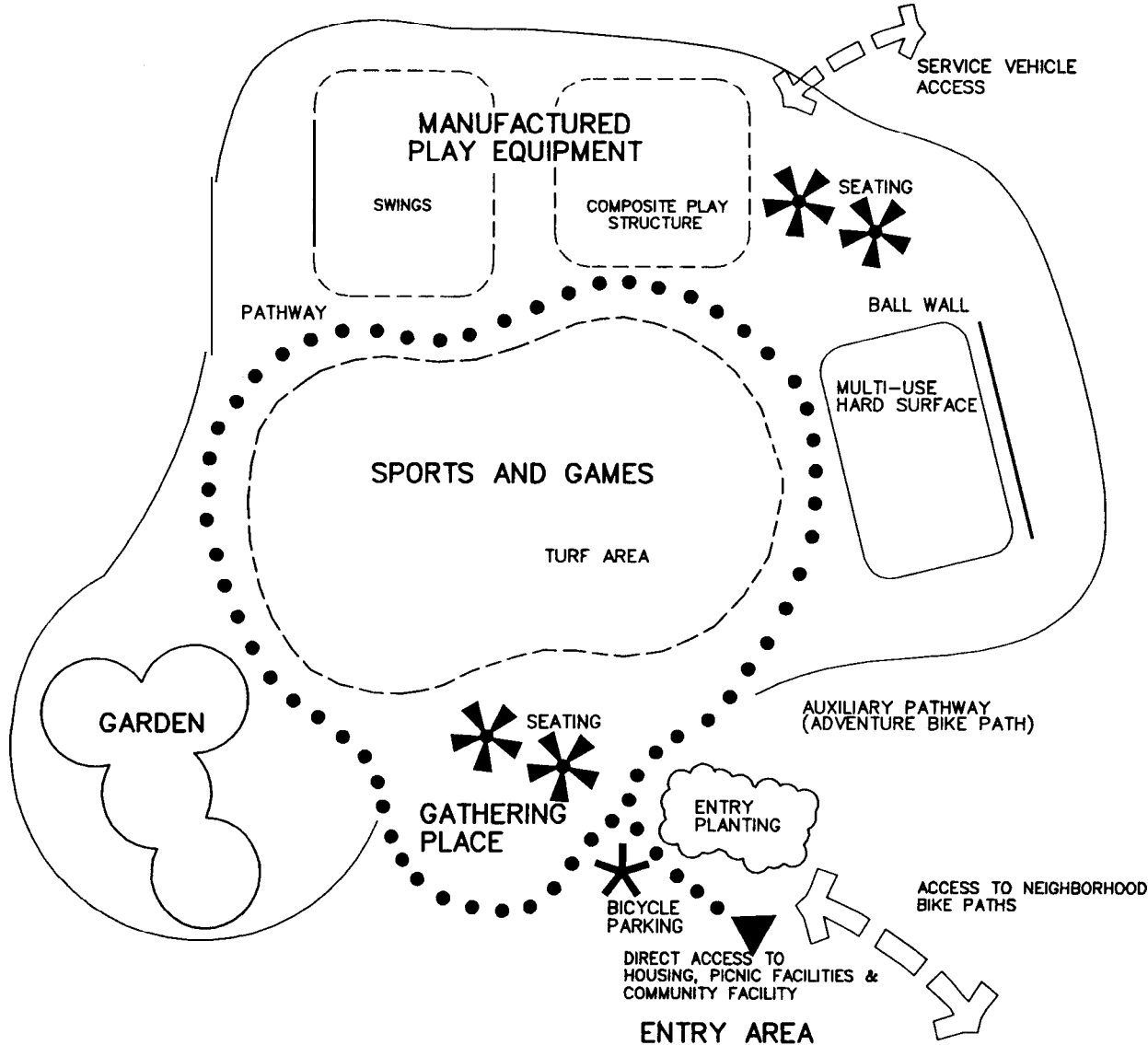


Figure 5-5. Neighborhood Park - Option 1 (9 to 15 Years).

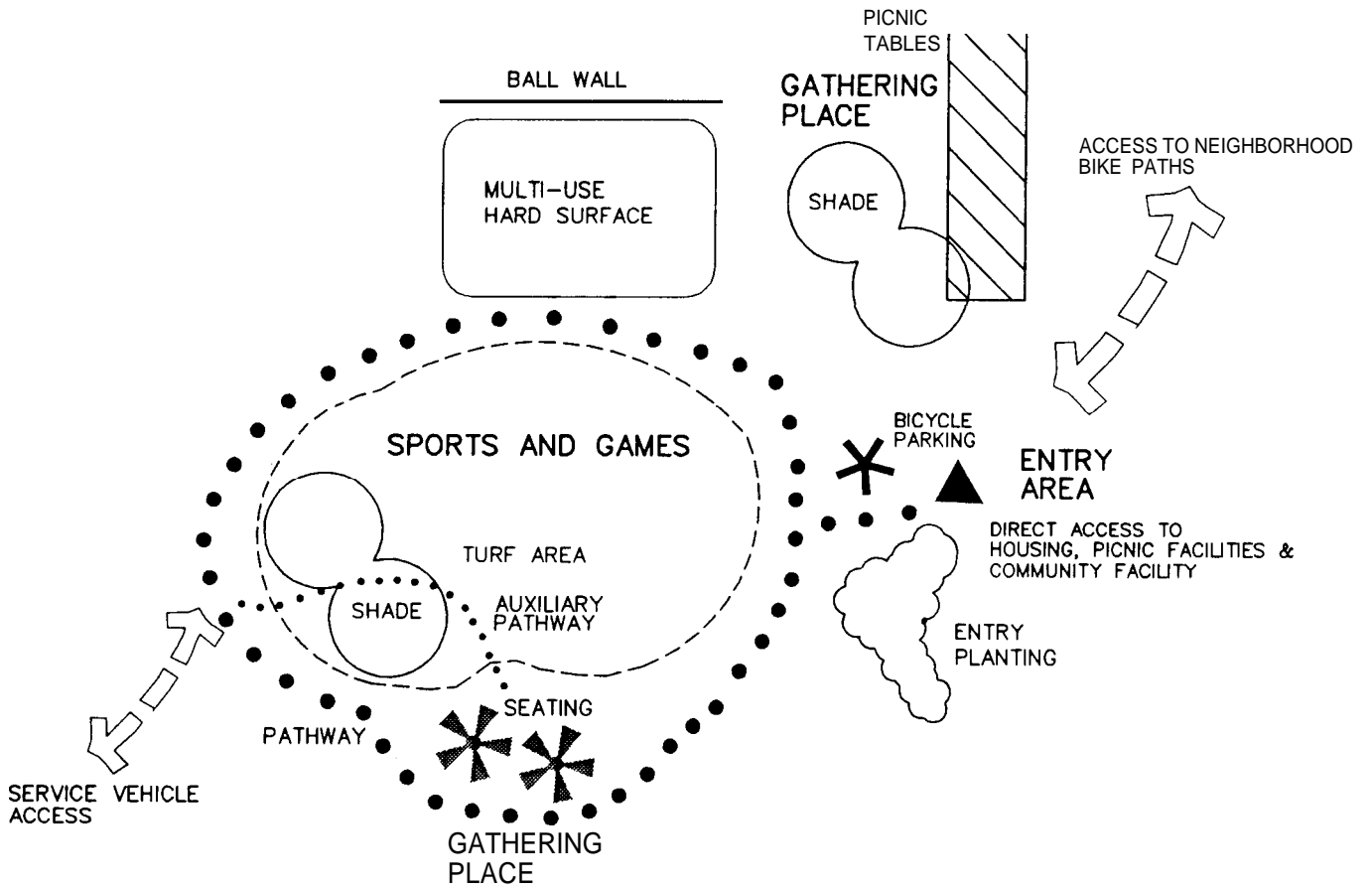


Figure 5-6. Neighborhood Park Option 2 (9 to 15 years).

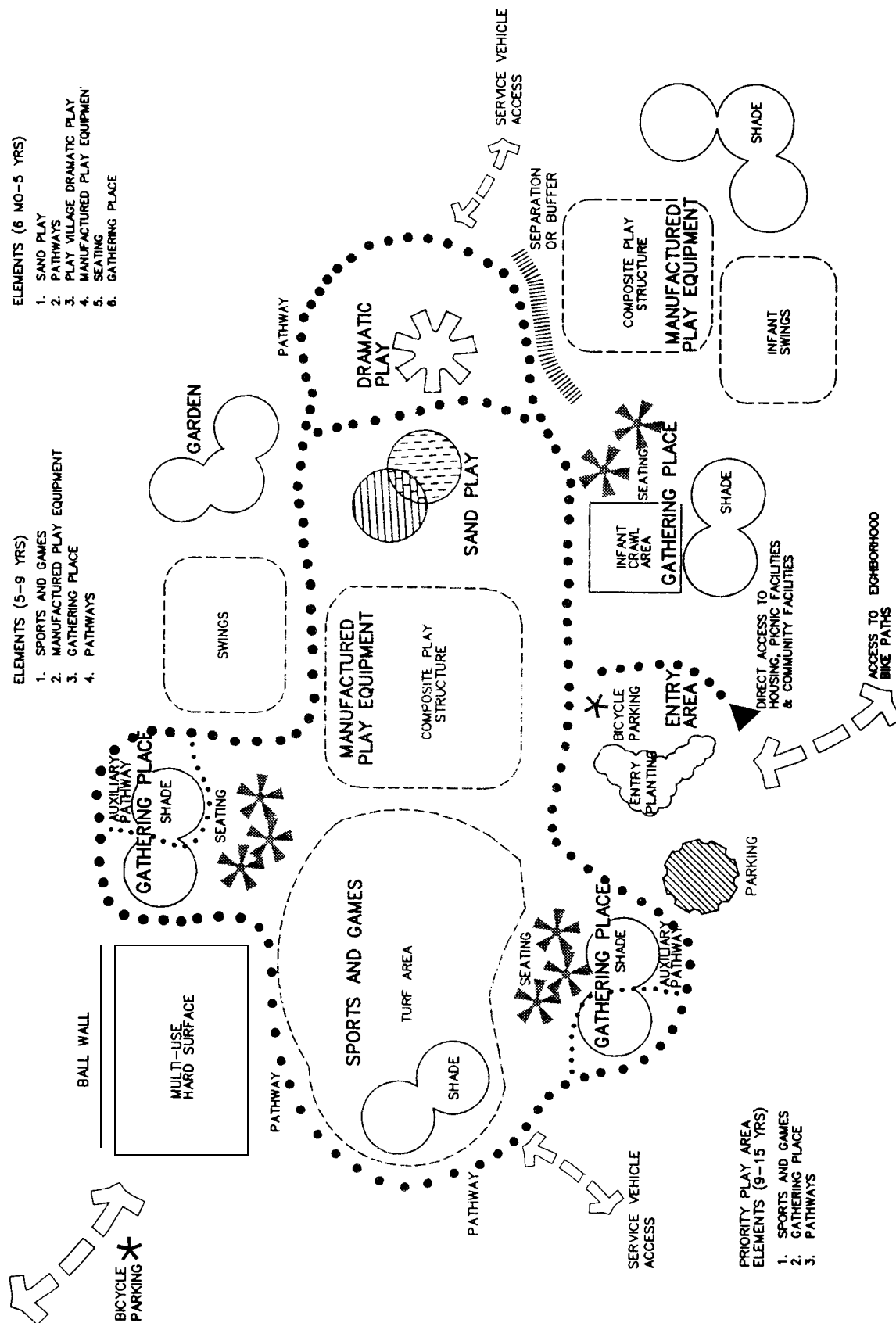


Figure 5-7 Community Park (0 to 15 Years).